02/22/23 • BIG PHARMA › VIEWS

Cancer Patient Faces 'Horrific' Choice: Keep Taking $50,000-a-Week Drug and Bankrupt His Family — or End Lifesaving Treatment

After Medicare abruptly stopped paying for his $50,000-a-week drug infusions required to treat his eye cancer, Paul Davis said he's faced with either leaving his family a huge pile of debt, or ending the treatments that help keep him alive.

By Kaiser Health News

24

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By Fred Schulte

After several rounds of treatment for a rare eye cancer — weekly drug infusions that could cost nearly $50,000 each — Paul Davis learned Medicare had abruptly stopped paying the bills.

That left Davis, a retired physician in Findlay, Ohio, contemplating a horrific choice: risk saddling his family with huge medical debt, if he had to pay those bills from the hospital out-of-pocket, or halt treatments that help keep him alive.

"Is it worth bankrupting my family for me to hang around for a couple of years?" Davis pondered. "I don't want to make that choice."

How much Davis will end up owing for his care remains unclear. One of the hospitals that has administered the costly drug is appealing Medicare's initial payment denials. And the family might not even know their total balance until Medicare rejects all the appeals.

But the uncertainty has compounded the stress of living with an aggressive cancer.

Davis, 71, was diagnosed in November 2019 with uveal melanoma, which afflicts eye tissue and is "one of the rarest tumors on the planet," he said.

The cancer spread from his eye to his liver, which typically proves fatal within a year. He was told a new rare-disease drug called Kimmtrak offered the only hope for prolonging his life.

Approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in January 2022 as the "first and only" treatment for metastatic uveal melanoma, Kimmtrak has

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kept his tumors stable, according to Davis. His oncologist told him he should stay on the drug "until it stops working."

Its manufacturer markets the drug's power to deliver "6-month improvement in median overall survival."

Davis said he started taking the medicine last summer at the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital in Columbus.

The hospital billed a total of $49,367.70 for his intravenous chemotherapy administered on Sept. 13, 2022. The charge for the drug came to $47,838; the rest covered fees for lab work and administering the drug.

Medicare paid the provider $11,668.86 for those services, according to Medicare records explaining his benefits.

His subsequent treatments at the Columbus hospital were covered, too, according to Medicare billing statements Davis reviewed.

But things changed after he transferred his care to a hospital in Findlay in October to spare his wife, Jane, from driving him 100 miles each way to weekly appointments in Columbus.

Medicare has denied Kimmtrak coverage on claims submitted by Blanchard Valley Health System in Findlay, Davis said, pitching him into an agonizing dispute with hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills at stake.

After a KHN reporter contacted Blanchard Valley, the hospital connected Davis with a patient relations liaison, who is working to resolve the billing problem. Davis said last week that Medicare apparently rejected the claims because the Findlay hospital mistakenly billed for using Kimmtrak to treat a different cancer, for which its use is not approved.

Davis said the patient relations liaison told him it might take at least 45 days to straighten out the bill, but the hospital would not dun him, even if it lost the appeal.

Meanwhile, the charges for Kimmtrak "are in limbo," Davis said.

Amy Leach, the hospital's director of public relations, said she could not comment on Davis' case, but in an email wrote: "Blanchard Valley Health System is committed to ensuring that accurate billing occurs and we work with our patients to promptly resolve any concerns."

Stacie Dusetzina, a health policy and drug pricing expert at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, said Davis is right to worry.

"I hope the hospital will fix this for him and that they are communicating with him about it," she said.

Sebastien Desprez, a spokesperson for Oxfordshire, England-based Immunocore, which manufactures Kimmtrak, said its list price was $19,229 per weekly dose. He said the drug's approval by the FDA shows "there is value for patients."

Cancer drug prices "are outrageous," said Dr. Hagop Kantarjian, who chairs the Department of Leukemia at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Texas.

Kantarjian said the prices manufacturers charge for cancer drugs have soared from less than $10,000 annually in the late 1990s to more than $200,000 annually today.

And that's not even the full cost. Dusetzina said hospitals often hugely inflate the price of drugs in the bills they issue "so that if someone doesn't pay, [the hospital] can write it off."

Merith Basey, executive director of Patients for Affordable Drugs, an advocacy group, said no ordinary person can handle the price of these drugs.

"It's simple: Drugs don't work if people can't afford them … no one should be

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poor because they are sick or be sick because they are poor," she said.

This is not Davis' first time staring down a supersized medical bill.

Davis and his daughter, Elizabeth Moreno, were the subject of the 2018 debut article in the KHN-NPR "Bill of the Month" series over her $17,850 bill for a urine test.

Davis wound up paying a Texas lab $5,000 to settle that bill, which private insurers said should have cost a hundred dollars or less. Davis spoke at a May 2019 White House event to support legislation to crack down on "surprise" medical bills.

But at least he knew where he stood with the urine testing bill. Now he's facing escalating costs of his cancer care without knowing how it will affect his family's finances.

"How do you make an informed choice if you have no information?" Davis asked.

Originally published by Kaiser Health News.

Fred Schulte, an investigative reporter, has worked at The Baltimore Sun, the South Florida Sun Sentinel, and the Center for Public Integrity.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Children's Health Defense.

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Julie Diaz

a day ago edited

Drugs and surgery are not the only option. Energy frequency healing has been proven to eliminate tumors in many people go to eesystem.com I have visited a 24-unit system in

Hillsborough, NJ, and after several hours of the energy, healed my foot pain, shoulder pain, and recovered from jaundice after a severe gallbladder attack. It's FAR less expensive and safer.

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holisticpoet
a day ago

This article is a non sequitur. Big pharma has no desire whatsoever to heal anyone of cancer. Their entire purpose is to extract as much revenue from the patient while keeping that patient alive just long enough for maximum financial extraction. It does not cost a lot of money to naturally heal nearly every condition.

According to Webster Kerr who happens to be the only cancer researcher I am aware of that researches natural, unpatentable products for healing cancer states that 90% of people who take Gold Standard sulfur crystals and clean up their diet go into complete remission and never face cancer again. For those who have gone through chemo and radiation therapy this 90% drops to only 50% of them who will go into remission.

The kicker is that if you live for five years after being diagnosed with cancer you are considered to be cured by our medical profession. It does not matter if you die of your cancer in five years and one day, they call this being cured. We live in a sick world.

4 0 Reply • Share ›

fedupwithlies → holisticpoet
9 hours ago

"Cured" means CURED. That means forever. Sickening how they say anything NOT created by and profited by Pharma, can't "Diagnose, treat or cure any disease". BUT, THEIR drugs ca RIIIIIIIGHT!! Caner Research is a massive lie. It's NOT research, it's PROFIT. NOTHING else! They are the Mafia.

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MultiChubby1 → holisticpoet
a day ago

Does Dr. Kerr have a website? Please post a link.

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holisticpoet → MultiChubby1
7 hours ago

The website is cancertutor.com

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Barbara
a day ago

Thank you for posting this story. We will be praying healing and financial provision for this man and his family.
Chris Wark has an amazing story about beating cancer and now coaches cancer patients through his Square One program. It is available on DVD but is actually being offered online without cost this week. I believe one new episode per night is being released as of yesterday. If interested, here's the link to access that series: https://sq1.chrisbeatcancer...

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Alan
a day ago

Best to fight cancer naturally instead of expensive toxic drugs.

5 1 Reply • Share ›

Jeff Witzeman
a day ago

Articles like this just keep the allopathic fraud alive. Those drugs are not the only option nor would I call them life saving. As a documentary filmmaker with numerous films at jwfilms.org showing real health vs corporate health, I can unequivocally say that when you don't research true methods of healing and promote a limited petrochemical to solve a deeper problem, nobody wins. Exit the matrix.(By the way, what is Kaiser Health News doing on here, some of the most egregious violators of free choice for their own workers?!?)

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LinUK
17 hours ago

Now you know why there will never be a cure for cancer.

2 0 Reply • Share ›

ME MCC
a day ago

Why would any medication cost $50,000? Outrageous! Maybe go to another country where the medication is less?

2 1 Reply • Share ›

Mary Burke
a day ago

I think this is Big BIG pharm problem. They have gotten away with taking advantage of a vulnerable, desperate population of people. This man wants to live. He has contributed to society. This is the thanks we extend to him. So wrong on so many levels.

2 1 Reply • Share ›

TAJF ↗ Mary Burke
21 hours ago

Please explain why you believe that that it is ethical to force corporations to sell medication at a loss? I ask you this as a cancer patient on Medicare that is prescribed medication that costs $180k a year. While you're at it, explain why we must pay for the needs of the Ukraine, every illegal alien that illegally crosses our border, pay for sex change operations and find way to support drug users that are actively try to kill themselves by shooting up to death.

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mcwinaz
5 hours ago

There is no way in hell this drug OR any drug should cost this much. It is pure extortion, and both Big Pharma and our crooked govt is responsible for allowing it to happen. I agree w/others who have said - find a natural alternative, if possible, and do all you can to live the healthiest lifestyle possible. I truly fear for my life in pursuing any type of allopathic medicine after seeing how most of the medical-MAFIA community has reacted over the last 3 years.

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fedupwithlies
9 hours ago

ONLY in AMERICA do drug companies make medicine SOOOO expensive, almost nobody can afford to live after something that is most likely CAUSED BY their chemicals and drugs. All "medications" are absurdly priced. As much as 1000% higher than any other country. America has the greediest, most evil people on the planet. Don't have 50-100 million dollars or more? Sorry. You die. LOOK FOR NATURAL AND NOD PHARMA DRUG HEALING. Your body works with nature, nature works to heal your body. Chemicals and drugs are what CAUSE most all ailments. ALWAYS trust nature, FIRST. Nature works side by side with God.

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Ricky Ricardo
a day ago

"Approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration". Is that supposed to mean something! We would be much better off without the FDA, EPA, CDC, and the rest of the criminal organisations! I think that I will go and look up the meaning of EXTORTION! These evil scum have quite a racket going...poison the masses from every direction, make them sick; then bankrupt them, while "promising" to make them well!

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MultiChubby1
a day ago

Heartbreaking. The bottom is going to fall out sooner than later..

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Naga
2 days ago

Everyone's in on reducing the world's population.

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Columngirl
an hour ago

THIS DOCTOR SHOULD FIND OUT ABOUT DMSO EYE DROPS AND CHLORINE DIOXIDE EYE DROPS THAT WOULD DO IT PLUS A CLEAN DIET WHILE HEALING. THERE ARE SO MANY REMEDIES OUT THERE NOW TO CURE CANCERS AND THE PARASITES CAUSING IT, IF HE GOT VACCINATED HE NEEDS TO FIND THE SOLUTIONS TO ELIMINATING THE SYNETHIC SPIKE PROTEINS, AND THE GOOD THAT ELIMINATE METALS THAT ARE IN THE VACCINES, AND THE MEDIAL DRUGS.

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Italia Alata wordpress blog
8 hours ago

The Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 was a vaccine-caused disease Posted by Barbara Peterson I. Honorof, E. McBean (Vaccination The Silent Killer p28) Source: Dr. Rebecca Carley

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The Drug Story : How Rockefeller Created Dangerous Pharmaceutical Industry

https://dokumen.pub/the-dru...

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Paul Hastilow
18 hours ago

There are many homeopathic remedies that can stop cancer growth.
Medicinal Marijuana is the most effective. Rick Simpsons Oil is tried and tested
Over the last 10 yrs.....and a hell of a lot cheaper than toxic pharmaceuticals. Also a change in diet is required. Eat Alkaline foods, instead of Acidic.
Avo's, Bananas,Almonds, Kale, the list is long, research it. Cut out Red Meat, Sugar, GMO foods, Alcohol, Processed Milk and Chemical Sodas. These are Food for Cancers, they thrive in an Acidic State, caused by high sugar levels.
Cancer can not Survive in A Blood with a ph of 7.2 or higher. (Acid is 1 to 7...Alkaline is 7 to 14)
Most Chemist sell ph Balance tablets. Or use Epsom Salts, or Bicarbonate of Soda.
Obesity and Diabetes will be countered with Diet change. No More Junk Food.
Eat Fruit and Green Fresh Vegetables. You body is built to cure itself. Treat it properly.
A Strong Mental attitude helps, be Positive. And Good luck.

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Lynette Sunderland
18 hours ago

CHD can contect me directly and i will forward contacts.

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Children's Health Defense® is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Its mission is to end childhood health epidemics by working aggressively to eliminate harmful exposures, hold those responsible accountable, and to establish safeguards to prevent future harm.

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